



The European Union, South Asia and Democracy in Development: Dialogue and Partnership

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Abstract

South Asian countries can engage in building an edifice of sustainable democracy, enter a new era of regional collaboration for managing transboundary problems and explore the possibilities for building a partnership with the European Union (EU) for democracy in development. South Asian countries should welcome and participate in efforts to forge an EU-South Asia Partnership for Democracy in Development. Policies are being put in place jointly to address common challenges such as climate change, sustainable government, security and stability, governance and human rights, as well as the prevention of, and responses to, natural and human disasters. Good prospects exist for agreeing a new EU-South Asia Partnership to achieve sustainable global action for Democracy in Development on a bilateral and a regional basis based on dialogue with policymakers in South Asia and the SAARC Secretary-General. This paper assesses the nature of current partnerships between the EU and various South Asian governments and institutions to enhance democratic development, analyses the reasons for the modest progress achieved so far and formulates recommendations in order to enhance the success of these partnerships.

Summary of Recommendations

There is now an underlying resolve that the EU should promote a modern liberal version of democracy all over the globe, but it is important that before the EU takes initiatives in South Asia it should first listen to South Asian countries. EU decision-makers must also have a thorough understanding of: the dynamics of developments relating to democracy in South Asia and its sustainability; the links between Islamcity and democracy in the South Asia region, where there is a sizeable Muslim population; and the link between democracy, governance, development and peace in a regionalizing and globalizing South Asia. EU interaction and policy towards South Asia should be developed with a proper understanding of the progress in democracy building that has already been made and taking into account the perceptions of knowledgeable policy analysts and academics in South Asia.

EU delegations in the region must disseminate information in major regional languages on the norms and practices in public communication and the institutions of the EU, and public consultation techniques and deliberative public engagement, which emphasizes interaction and includes deliberative dialogue and citizen assemblies. A more concerted effort by the EU at the level of SAARC, supported by a High-level Advisory Group from the SAARC countries, is likely to prove more useful than the current diffused efforts mainly at the Track II level by political foundations in individual countries.

South Asia can learn a lot from the modern day EU and especially from the working of its bodies. In turn, the EU can learn from South Asia, particularly from India, about secularism, multiculturalism and federalism. A relationship in which the EU and South Asia each learn from and encourage the other should be the aim.

Historically, the record of Europe has been mixed, producing imperialism and militarism, on the one hand, and creating and spreading values such as liberty, justice, human rights, democracy, the spirit of scientific enquiry and development cooperation with the developing world, on the other.

1. Introduction

Historically, the record of Europe has been mixed, producing imperialism and militarism, on the one hand, and creating and spreading values such as liberty, justice, human rights, democracy, the spirit of scientific enquiry and development cooperation with the developing world, on the other. The European Union (EU), the member states of which have achieved, inter alia, stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and

respect for, and protection of, minorities, is keen to promote a modern liberal version of democracy in countries beyond its borders – in its own interest and in theirs. In this context, South Asian countries can engage in building an edifice of sustainable democracy, enter a new era of regional collaboration for managing transboundary problems and explore the possibilities for building a partnership with the EU for democracy in development.

South Asian countries should welcome and participate in efforts to forge an EU-South Asia Partnership for Democracy in Development at a time when:

- EU policy on development cooperation is based on the 2005 European Consensus on Development;
- The EU is considering developing a consensus on democracy;
- The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union have established a financing instrument for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide (2007-13);
- Practically all South Asian countries have democratic structures, but are still struggling on the road to democratic development; and
- Civil society in several South Asian countries is becoming more robust.

This is therefore the time for the EU to make democracy assistance a real and meaningful part of the EU's relationship with the countries of South Asia and with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). A more concerted effort by the EU at the level of SAARC, supported by a High-level Advisory Group from the SAARC

countries, is likely to prove more useful than the current diffused efforts mainly at the Track II level by political foundations in individual South Asian countries.

The purpose of the present paper is to assess the nature of current partnerships between the EU and various South Asian governments and institutions to enhance democratic development, to analyse the reasons for the modest progress achieved so far and to formulate recommendations to enhance the success of these partnerships.

Our paper 'Prospects for Democratic Development in South Asia and the European Union's role in Democracy Building' (Mukherjee Reed and Bhargava 2009) elaborates on the conceptual aspects of such a partnership by focusing on a developmental approach to democracy building.

The EU has a strategic partnership with India and bilateral agreements with five major South Asian countries. The EU also has a Joint Declaration and a Country Strategy Paper in respect of Afghanistan. Although the EU intends to focus on bilateral relationships with South Asian countries, it considers SAARC to be a factor for internal stability in South Asia.

2. Interaction between the European Union and South Asia

Relations between the EU and South Asian countries have evolved and developed from simple commercial cooperation agreements, known as first generation agreements. In some cases these were replaced in the 1980s by second generation agreements, which included economic cooperation; and in the 1990s by third generation agreements, which included development cooperation and a mutual commitment to respect values such as human rights.¹ In addition to contractual relations, South Asian countries have also benefited from EU policy on a generalized system of trade preferences (GSP), food aid and other forms of development cooperation. By 1992, support for regional cooperation was a priority area and technical and financial assistance an important factor in the EU's relations with South Asian countries.

The EU has a strategic partnership with India and bilateral agreements with five major South Asian countries. The EU also has a Joint Declaration and a Country Strategy Paper in respect of Afghanistan. Although the EU intends to focus on bilateral relationships with South Asian countries, it considers SAARC to be a factor for internal stability in South Asia. It is the policy of the EU to develop a comprehensive economic partnership with India, while other South Asian countries are viewed more as cases for development aid and development cooperation programmes.

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The European Union and Afghanistan

The EU and the Government of Afghanistan are committed to a secure, stable, free, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan. The Country Strategy Paper for Afghanistan 2007–2013 was drafted against an evolving political and economic background. The Afghanistan Compact launched in January 2006 provides the political framework for cooperation between Afghanistan and the international community for the period 2007–2013. The EU's assistance reflects the priorities set out in Afghanistan's National

¹ See Bhargava and Sridhar Khatri (eds) 2001.

Development Strategy, adopted at the Paris Conference in June 2008, including support for justice and law and order, combating narcotics production and assisting the health sector. The United Nations Security Council endorsed the key elements identified in the 12 June Paris Declaration as essential for the security and prosperity of the Afghan people, including the importance of holding free, fair and secure elections in 2009 and 2010; ensuring respect for human rights and the provision of humanitarian assistance; and the need to improve the effectiveness of aid in order to ensure that the benefits of development are tangible for every Afghan. The UN has called on all relevant actors to give their full support to the enhanced coordinating role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

India and the EU represent the largest democracies in the world and their partnership is based on the solid foundation of shared values and beliefs. Their common commitment to democracy, pluralism, the rule of law and multilateralism in international relations is a factor for global stability and peace.

The European Union-India Strategic Partnership

As a result of the zigzag course of SAARC and its slow progress since its inception, the EU has concentrated on developing bilateral relations with India, including an EU-India Action Plan for Strategic Partnership. India and the EU represent the largest democracies in the world and their partnership is based on the solid foundation of shared values and beliefs. Their common commitment to democracy, pluralism, the rule of law and multilateralism in international relations is a factor for global stability and peace.

Currently, negotiations are taking place between the EU and India on a free trade area. Other areas of cooperation and dialogue include: operationalization of cooperation between Europol and its Indian counterpart as well as work towards a comprehensive agreement on climate change and clean and sustainable development, maritime transport and negotiations on concluding a broadly based trade and investment agreement. The EU and India also aim to address higher education policy and cooperation issues and to increase the exchange of students and academics, thereby forging increasingly close cultural and research links. Science and Technology cooperation between the EU and India is now on a solid foundation and will be strengthened in the future.² The EU and India recognize the need to work together to ensure a stable Afghanistan, and have agreed to provide assistance to Kabul to ensure free elections.

European Union-South Asia Interaction

EU-South Asia interaction has so far seen little progress on the ground in the area of democracy in development. Democratic processes in several South Asian countries have stalled. At the regional level, SAARC has made little headway. Modest progress has been made with programmes supported by European political foundations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the form of increased awareness of issues such as the empowerment of women, the role of the media in advancing the public interest and labour relations.

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² See the EU-India Update Newsletter July-September 2008 issued by the Delegation of the European Commission to India.

On four issues which affect people's daily lives in South Asia – the provision of clean water and flood control, energy, food and the environment – the EU can extend technical and financial assistance to SAARC for developing and implementing viable cross-border projects which address the basic needs of the people of South Asia.

It is perhaps inappropriate to see the EU as a model that can simply be copied by SAARC. Nonetheless, such a comparison could be useful because the EU has gathered considerable experience. Policymakers in South Asia are only now becoming aware of the rising cost of non-cooperation in the region. While the EU has largely settled the issue of sovereignty versus federalism and articulated the principle of subsidiarity, SAARC is way behind on these matters. Trade integration and the formation of a customs union and an eventual economic union are areas where SAARC could learn from the EU's experience. SAARC is working with the European Commission in many of these areas with a view to understanding its model and learning from its experiences, creating an enabling atmosphere to forge greater integration.

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A proper understanding of South Asian perceptions of democracy in development should shape the EU's approach. However problems may be encountered in developing EU-SAARC interaction on democracy in development because the SAARC Charter does not contain a reference to democracy. The institutionalization process in South Asia may provide an opening, however, and Track II Dialogues hold some promise for interaction to develop at the regional level as well as possible avenues for action at the bilateral level.

3. The Institutionalization Process in South Asian Regional Cooperation

Institution building is frontloaded in the EU but back loaded in SAARC. SAARC has been often a victim of being state stalled as opposed to ASEAN which is state driven. The institutional framework in SAARC is very much modelled on ASEAN. For ASEAN, the EU is a model. SAARC is still not displaying the characteristics of a regional society. It has hardly moved beyond the stage of a regional system of states.³

Sceptics may doubt the possibility of any meaningful EU-SAARC Partnership for Democracy in Development because, as is noted above, there is no reference to Democracy in the SAARC Charter, but democracy is closely linked to development and effective regional cooperation, which are important objectives of SAARC. It is also pertinent to recall that in their Declaration at the New Delhi Summit, SAARC leaders declared 2008 the SAARC year of Good Governance.

The only SAARC document to contain a reference to democracy is the agreement for the establishment of the South Asian University. Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh observed in his address to the 15th SAARC summit that 'The winds of democracy and political change have swept across our region.' Former Prime Minister of India I.K.

³ Sridharan and Srinivasa-Raghavan (2007).

Gujral observed ‘The people of South Asia as well as their leaders must open the doors of potential democratic solutions and opportunities to the problems faced by them’.

However, the South Asia region lacks an effective regime of institutions and legal agreements to foster and support democratization, peace and regional cooperation. SAARC is useful but limited by its purely consultative nature and the inbuilt limitations of its Charter.⁴ SAARC took a formal decision in 1992 to establish relations with the EU. Since 1994, political dialogue has been held between EU and SAARC Foreign Ministers at the margins of the UN General Assembly. In some ways the EU is a priority organization for SAARC in view of the 1998 SAARC Summit Declaration that ‘priority needs to be given in establishing contact with those regional groupings which have experience in economic cooperation and functional regional cooperation’.⁵

Following meetings between the European Commission and the SAARC secretariat, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was concluded between the EU and SAARC in 1996 which resulted in cooperation in four trade-related areas. In 1999 the EU and SAARC agreed to cooperate on improving market access for SAARC products into the EU. The EU was admitted to SAARC as an Observer in 2007. Observers are invited to present proposals and projects involving collaboration without being involved in decision-making.

Two SAARC intergovernmental decisions that will have an impact on democracy in development in South Asia are the agreement to adopt the SAARC Social Charter (SSC), signed in January 2004, and the agreement to establish the South Asian University, signed at the 14th SAARC Summit in April 2007.

The SSC establishes a people-centered framework for social development to guide the work of SAARC member states. In Article II of the SSC, South Asian countries recognize that information and communication technology can help to fulfil social development goals and that the participation of women as equal partners in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life must be ensured through policies and programmes. Areas covered by the SSC in addition to those for which regional conventions and agreements exist are poverty alleviation, health, education, human resource development and youth mobilization, and population stabilization.

The SSC defines past commitments and ongoing and future efforts within a larger framework of social values and norms that guide social policy in the countries of the region. It translates these commitments as far as possible into rights, entitlements and obligations, providing a clear framework of social accountability for states. The SSC can serve as the linkage between regional and global social norms. The SSC requires member states to formulate a national plan of action to operationalize its provisions through a transparent and broadly based participatory process.

Among the major objectives of the *South Asian University* are to provide liberal and humane education and to endow its scholars with democratic ideals. The South Asian University would be an appropriate location for a South Asian Centre for the Study of Democracy to be set up to deal, inter alia, with matters relating to democracy and governance within South Asia.

⁴ All decisions must be taken unanimously and bilateral or contentious issues cannot be raised.

⁵ See Para. 31 of the Declaration of the 1998 SAARC Summit held in Sri Lanka

SAARC Recognized Bodies are important adjuncts for harnessing the contribution of civil society in South Asia to regional cooperation. The *SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry* (SCCI), formed in 1991, seeks to promote greater economic cooperation in South Asia with a view to ultimately establishing a SAARC Economic Union. It has an important responsibility to discharge for ensuring that ‘economic freedoms, the second most important aspect of human development, happen to the fullest possible extent without diluting equity considerations’. Economic integration requires certain prior conditions to be fulfilled and the SCCI has a proactive role to play in creating them.⁶

South Asia is currently at a low ebb on the economic freedom index. The SCCI has, through seminars on economic freedom in South Asia, encouraged individual and institutional liberty in the economic sphere, leading to both human development and economic growth through enhanced economic cooperation among SAARC member states. Economic freedom and development are directly linked and help to reduce poverty.

The *Association of Speakers and Members of Parliament of SAARC Countries* (SAARC ASMOP) was formally launched in 1992. Its objectives include strengthening people-to-people contact, and providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on parliamentary practices and procedures and for making suggestions on cooperation in international forums in matters of common interest. It has not been active and it needs to be energized to promote in letter and in spirit the theme of democracy in development in the South Asian region. A first genuine step towards enshrining the principles and practices of democracy in development would be to transform this Association into a SAARC Parliamentary Assembly.

The *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in Law*, SAARCLAW, is an association of the legal communities of the SAARC countries comprising judges, lawyers, academicians, law teachers, public officers and a host of other law-related persons, duly registered with the SAARC secretariat at Kathmandu and. It was established in Colombo on 24th October 1991 and is intended to spread knowledge about the various South Asian legal systems among the legal communities in the region. It has been given the status of a Regional Apex Body of SAARC. It owes its origin to the desire of members of the legal community to establish an association within the SAARC region to disseminate information and to promote an understanding of the concerns and developments of the region.

The *South Asian Free Media Association* (SAFMA) was formed in July 2000 against the background of an acute information deficit with little or no flow of information across borders.⁷ It is an inclusive, broadly based network of mainstream journalists from all media sectors striving to strengthen media capacity and to promote access to and the free flow of information within countries and across the region. The SAARC Council of Ministers granted the status of SAARC Recognized Body to SAFMA in 2004. SAFMA is playing a pivotal role in building bridges of understanding and confidence in the region. It supports the South Asia Media Commission in its efforts to defend press freedom, audit media content and provide guidelines to enhance professional standards.

⁶ For a detailed understanding of this subject matter, see section on ‘Creating economic opportunities’, Panandiker and Rahul Tripathi (2007), pp. 7–9.

⁷ See the booklet on SAFMA, available at www.southasianmedia.net

In June 2007 parliamentarians representing all the major parties in the SAARC countries adopted the Shimla Declaration, agreeing to form a South Asian Parliamentary Forum to move towards realizing the dream of a South Asian Parliament. The Conference proposed the creation of an Intra-Parliamentary Union in South Asia, and the appointment of an expert group to prepare a comprehensive report on and a timeframe for establishing a South Asian Parliament. It also activated the SAARC Speakers Forum, which will hold an annual meeting of parliamentarians to discuss issues of regional concern. To implement all the above, the conference proposed the constitution of a commission consisting of MPs from all eight member countries and two experts under the Speaker of the Indian Lok Sabha.

The *South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre* (SAHRDC) is a network of individuals across the region. It seeks to investigate, document and disseminate information about human rights treaties and conventions, provide human rights education, and monitor refugees, media freedom, prison reform and political imprisonment as well as torture, summary executions, disappearances and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. SAHRDC has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. SAHRDC has been conducting a series of human rights training programmes in the South Asia and East Asia regions.

Human rights, peace and democracy are the main areas of concern of the *South Asia Forum for Human Rights* (SAFHR), which was set up in 1990. SAFHR is committed to the promotion of the interlinkages between human rights, peace and substantive democracy. It has branches in India and Pakistan and a regional secretariat in Nepal.

With sufficient political will and an innovative approach, there are good prospects for SAARC to make progress in the area of regional public goods, such as health, education, environment, transport and energy grids. All this may have important implications for strengthening EU-South Asian bilateral and regional interaction, taking it to the next stage of partnership.

Conclusion

Institutionally, SAARC is not strong. It lacks organizations comparable to the Council of Europe, the European Court of Justice or the European Parliament, although it is progressing ideationally – albeit in a painfully slow manner. It may develop institutionally in future by both adapting and adopting the institutions of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the EU and through innovation. By undertaking comparisons with ASEAN and the EU, and by forming links with these two organizations, SAARC decision-makers will improve their understanding of – and profit from – their experiences. With sufficient political will and an innovative approach, there are good prospects for SAARC to make progress in the area of regional public goods, such as health, education, environment, transport and energy grids. All this may have important implications for strengthening EU-South Asian bilateral and regional interaction, taking it to the next stage of partnership.

4. The EU in South Asia: Partnership, Dialogue and Autonomous Action⁸

Partnership

Track I and Track II Dialogues between EU and South Asian scholars may provide insights into possible programmes of action for democracy building in the region that can be carried out either in the framework of a truly mutual partnership or by the EU taking autonomous action. The latter will have to be informed by an understanding of the views of South Asian experts about the state of democracy in South Asia and about what form EU interaction with and policy towards South Asia should take.

In May 1994, the Chairman of the then European Institute of South and South-East Asian Studies, Dr. Oscar Debunne, talked about the justifiable expectations of SAARC countries for special attention and appreciation from the European Union and its member states with regard to the growth of democratic processes in the region.⁹ Today, however, only a few NGOs and political foundations from EU countries are active in South Asia at the bilateral level, and whenever possible at the regional level, although mention must be made of the efforts of the European Parliament in this area.

The EU has rightly refrained from imposing or exporting democracy and instead aims to support it by peaceful means. As European Commission President José Manuel Barroso observed, 'Showing the way does not mean imposing the way'.¹⁰ There is now an underlying resolve that the EU should promote a modern liberal version of democracy all over the globe, but it is important that before the EU takes initiatives in South Asia it should first listen to South Asian countries. EU decision-makers must also have a thorough understanding of: the dynamics of developments relating to democracy in South Asia and its sustainability; the links between Islamcity and democracy in the South Asia region, where there is a sizeable Muslim population; and the link between democracy, governance, development and peace in a regionalizing and globalizing South Asia. In this context, and given the significant goodwill that exists in South Asia for the EU and its institutions, the EU can and should play a proactive role in democracy building in the region. EU interaction and policy towards South Asia should be developed with a proper understanding of the progress with democracy building that has already been made in the region and taking into account the perceptions of knowledgeable policy analysts and academics in South Asia.

In all South Asian countries, economies should be governed in consonance with the interests, demands and aspirations of the people from the

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In all South Asian countries, economies should be governed in consonance with the interests, demands and aspirations of the people from the ground up rather than planning from the top down. A democratic framework is vital to facilitate development, preserve the rich and varied cultures of South Asia and ensure that South Asia becomes an area of peace, prosperity and stability.

⁸ Part of this section is based on discussions at a Roundtable organized by the Principal Author in New Delhi on January 27, 2009 as summarized by Amar Nath Ram, Former Ambassador of India to EU.

⁹ See Kant Kishore, *Shaping South Asia's Future: Role of Regional Cooperation*, in Bhargava, Bongartz and Sobhan (eds), p. 54.

¹⁰ See Ash (2008).

ground up rather than planning from the top down. A democratic framework is vital to facilitate development, preserve the rich and varied cultures of South Asia and ensure that South Asia becomes an area of peace, prosperity and stability.¹¹ It is impossible to govern a large and diverse state such as India outside a democratic framework. The history of South Asia shows that military and authoritarian monarchical regimes cannot be sustained for a long period. The freedom of expression that exists in South Asia is a powerful factor that is supportive of democracy in development.

The issues of democracy in development in individual South Asian countries need to be addressed in a *differentiated manner* by focusing assistance.

- In India and Sri Lanka, assistance should be focused mainly on the field of governance. In India, support is required to build the capacity of elected Panchayat Raj representatives who are responsible for managing government schemes at the grass roots level. While the resources are there, an adequate focus on training those in charge of implementing programmes is lacking.¹²
- In Pakistan and Bangladesh the focus is mainly on getting the army back to barracks through persuasion so that these countries can develop along true democratic paths and become safe for the region and the world. They will also need economic assistance to overcome simultaneous crises in security, economics and completing the transition to democracy.
- In Bhutan and the Maldives technical cooperation programmes will be needed for a smooth transition to democracy from earlier forms of governance.
- In Afghanistan the creation is required of both human and physical infrastructure conducive to the functioning of democracy.

Given that almost 40 percent of the population of South Asia is Muslim, and that Afghanistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Pakistan are Islamic States, it is important to

understand the essence of the *Islamicity* of these governments. Islam advocates the establishment of democratic states based on popular participation and the rule of law.¹³ The Qur'an and Sunnah stipulate that certain political and legal principles are implemented and respected in any government established in a Muslim community. The tenets of Islam highlight the principle of participation in public affairs through the process of consultation or Shura, and the principle of legality or the rule of law.

It is evident that some sort of a policy framework exists for EU to aid democracy building processes, but there are enormous gaps between the policy that is indicated and the realities on the ground.

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¹¹ See Sikri, R., in Vohra (2001).

¹² See the speech of Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh at the National Conference of Chairpersons/CEOs of District Planning Committees, Indian Express of January 17, 09.

¹³ See Aboulmagd (2008).

Dialogue between the European Union and South Asia

Dialogue presupposes acknowledgement of the legitimacy of each other's perspectives and requires earnest efforts to understand them. When it comes to cooperation on democracy in development, EU and South Asian leaders should think big and aim high. It is important to capture the public's imagination and highlight one or two major headline initiatives.

In particular, the EU must in its dialogues with individual South Asian countries and with SAARC emphasize that actions that would promote regional stability, cooperation and development can best be undertaken in a democratic framework. Such awareness should grow in the region. For this purpose, the EU should share widely with South Asian countries and SAARC its experiences of democratic development. In particular, SAARC countries need to have a proper understanding and appreciation of the relevance of the *Copenhagen Criteria*, which serve as rules that define whether a country is eligible to join the EU. According to these criteria, membership requires that a candidate country has achieved stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for, and protection of, minorities, as well as the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces from within the EU.

The European Parliament has played an important role in encouraging the promotion of stable democracy throughout South Asia. Certain EU bodies such as the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the regions and the Congress of local and regional authorities facilitate people-to-people contacts and interaction. In its dialogue with SAARC, the EU could expatiate on the role of these bodies, of the European Parliament and its various Committees and of other institutions such as the Council of Europe. The utility and feasibility of setting up such bodies in South Asia might also be examined.

Parliamentarians play an important role in promoting better person-to-person ties and serve an important role as bridges between the people of different countries. SAARC ASMOP needs to be energized and should play an important role in harnessing popular support for the principles of consensus, mutual respect, the rule of law, democracy and human rights. In this context, it may be useful for Members of the European Parliament to meet periodically with members of ASMOP with a view to sharing with them EU experience of democracy in development, the European Consensus on Development and the evolving consensus in the 2005 EU on democracy with a view to promoting, to the extent possible, a similar consensus in South Asia on development and democracy.

Autonomous Action

Such action has to be within the general policy framework of the EU. The 2005 European Consensus on Development reflects the EU's willingness to eradicate

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The 2005 European Consensus on Development reflects the EU's willingness to eradicate poverty and build a more stable and equitable world. The document identifies shared values, goals, principles and commitments which the European Commission and EU member states will implement in their development policies, in particular those relating to reducing poverty and the Millennium Development Goals.

poverty and build a more stable and equitable world. The document identifies shared values, goals, principles and commitments which the European Commission and EU member states will implement in their development policies, in particular those relating to reducing poverty and the Millennium Development Goals. According to this Consensus, the EU will support development based on European democratic values and on the understanding that developing countries are mainly responsible for their own development.

The European Commission thus has a central role in promoting development cooperation with South Asian countries. Accordingly, the Commission could direct its efforts to meeting the needs of South Asian countries by concentrating its activities and developing partnerships with South Asian countries and SAARC in the areas of: trade and regional integration; the environment and the sustainable management of natural resources; infrastructures; water and energy; rural development, agriculture and food security; governance, democracy, human rights and support for economic and institutional reforms; prevention of conflicts and of state fragility; human development; and social cohesion and employment.

The President of the European Commission should ideally make reference at the next SAARC Summit to the European Consensus on Development and Financing Instrument for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide and underline the desirability of establishing EU-South Asia Partnership as an important means to advancing the cause of democracy in development in South Asia.

At the same time, through meetings and dialogues with concerned officials in South Asian countries and with the SAARC secretariat, European Commission officials need to demonstrate that existing forms of multifaceted engagement with South Asian countries and SAARC could, with some changes, translate or evolve in future into a more tangible contribution to democratic development in the region, as envisaged in the SAARC Social Charter.

The European Commission also needs to raise awareness in South Asian countries and in SAARC about The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the financing instrument established in 2006 for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide. More than EUR 5 billion has been allocated to Asia by the EU for the period 2007–2013. Policies are being put in place jointly to address common challenges such as climate change, sustainable government, security and stability, governance and human rights, as well as the prevention of, and responses to, natural and human disasters. Good prospects exist for agreeing a new EU-South Asia Partnership to achieve sustainable global action for Democracy in Development in some of the abovementioned areas on a bilateral and a regional basis based on dialogue with policymakers in South Asia and the SAARC Secretary-General.

European Political Foundations and Voluntary Organizations need to reorient their work and give priority in their programmes to generating awareness in South Asian countries about profiting from development cooperation programmes carried out under the 2005 European Consensus on Development, and from programmes related to promoting democracy and human rights that can be undertaken within the framework of the financing instrument for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide.

5. Multilateral Approaches: The EU and India, a Shared Commitment and a Convergent Agenda

An important development is the growing role in the region of India, which now has a dual responsibility arising from its pivotal role in the region and its emerging role as a new global power.¹⁴ Democracy in India exerts a powerful influence on political thinking in neighbouring countries. South Asian Countries including Pakistan are appreciative of the fact that India is a ‘mature nation and a stable democracy’ and of its democratic contribution.¹⁵ According to Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India, ‘The benefits of democracy must touch the lives of all our people, empowering them with economic, political, cultural and social freedom’.¹⁶ The Indian leadership is also conscious of shortcomings in the practice and experience of Indian democratic development.

The substantive divergence in the policies of the EU and India with regard to the promotion of democracy in South Asia is not as great now as is routinely presumed by some bureaucrats. The political leadership of the EU and India recognize that democratic development in South Asia is important for both the EU and India.

The substantive divergence in the policies of the EU and India with regard to the promotion of democracy in South Asia is not as great now as is routinely presumed by some bureaucrats. The political leadership of the EU and India recognize that democratic development in South Asia is important for both the EU and India. Fundamentally, European and, to some extent, Indian officials struggle with the same two challenges: whether and how to offer South Asian governments significant incentives for democratic reform, and how to harmonize the long-term objective of supporting democracy with shorter term strategic objectives. Other countries in the South Asia region could also profit from India’s valuable experience in the field of democracy in development, provided that they shed their apprehension over Indian hegemony and that India takes due care to avoid giving any such impression.

6. Results-oriented Policy Recommendations

Modest progress has already been achieved in promoting in South Asia the concept of democracy in development. This is largely due to the work of European political foundations and voluntary organizations. From time to time, the European Commission stresses the question of human rights and delegations from the European Parliament touch on the subject of democracy. Given the weight and influence of the EU, its record in the field of democracy and development, its status as an Observer in SAARC, and the evolution of thinking in South Asia on issues relating to social development, the time has come for a focused European approach based on sustained dialogue and true partnership between the EU and South Asia in this important field.

In the above context, the following recommendations are made, which are complementary to and supportive of the recommendations made in Mukherjee Reed/Bhargava (2009).

¹⁴ See ‘Reshaping Regional cooperation and Integration Process in Towards Freedom in South Asia’, in Panandiker and Tripathi (2007), p.267.

¹⁵ Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari quoted in *New York Times* of 9 December 2008.

¹⁶ Message on the occasion of the release of Panandiker and Tripathi, 2007.

Dissemination of relevant information pertaining to the European Union

EU delegations in the region must disseminate information in major regional languages, most notably Bangla, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and Tamil on:

- The norms and practices in public communication and the institutions of the EU;
- Public consultation techniques and deliberative public engagement, which emphasizes interaction and includes deliberative dialogue and citizen assemblies.

Track II Dialogues among the European Union and South Asian Scholars

Considerable work at the Track II level is required to articulate the concept of democracy in development in a way that is broadly acceptable at the regional level to all SAARC member states. EU policy analysts should discuss with their South Asian counterparts ways and means of lending support for the development of a political culture in South Asia that follows and implements the tenets of democracy in development.

EU member states should present their South Asian interlocutors with a shared approach to democracy building in South Asia that is not necessarily a single monolithic EU-level policy. Periodic EU-SAARC Dialogues at Track I or Track II level could then be held on different themes related to Democracy in Development. Such dialogues would facilitate elaboration of a South Asian consensus on a shared approach to democratic development. They might also assist in periodical assessment in the two regional groupings of respect for good governance, human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law with a view to reaching a shared understanding and identification of support measures based on the best practices of the two groupings and those of their member states. Such dialogues will have an important preventive dimension and will aim to ensure that agreed principles are upheld.

Initiatives by European Union Institutions

The EU must view South Asia in pragmatic and practical terms rather than from through an ideological prism. There are huge and evident differences between the EU and South Asia and, more importantly, South Asia is not a monolith and has marked diversities – even though many regard it as a single civilizational entity. While fashioning its development cooperation policy towards the South Asian region, the following perspectives should be borne in mind by EU policymakers:

- It would be more realistic to focus on ‘best practices’ in democracy in development and governance rather than to follow a model not relevant to South Asia.
- Information and experience sharing on democratic institutions such as parliaments, the media, the judiciary, Chambers of Commerce and civil society organizations should be expanded.
- Incentives for democratic governance are desirable but the EU model may not be applicable to South Asian countries. This question merits thorough examination in South Asian context.

In developing relationships with South Asian countries and SAARC in coming years, EU Institutions such as the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament need to capitalize on the European Consensus on Development, the Copenhagen Criteria for EU membership, and the EIDHR.

The European Commission

- The Commission should set up a high-level EU-South Asia Forum consisting of academics, media practitioners, policy analysts and parliamentarians from the two regions to make suggestions on South Asian development cooperation programmes and to promote exchanges of information on best practices in the two regions;
- This Forum should preferably hold its first meeting in the second half of 2009 and its first task must be to adopt an EU-South Asia Joint Declaration on agreed values and standards in the context of Democracy in Development;
- Such a forum should engage with Islamic scholars as well as eminent members of the Islamic community in the region in order to bridge the current divide in understanding of issues related to Islamicity and Democracy.
- The Commission should promote exchanges and linkages between EU media organizations and the South Asian Media, as well as between the SCCI and the European Chamber of Commerce on matters related to participatory democracy and the rule of law.
- The Commission should coordinate with state and non-state actors in South Asia over the formulation and implementation of programmes for democracy in development, and work with South Asian governments and the SAARC secretariat to agree on common criteria for determining sustained progress with democracy in development as well as steps to reform and reduce the cost of introducing democracy in development.
- The Commission should propose measures to improve the coordination of the provision of non-governmental aid for programmes for democratic development in specific South Asian countries, and for the efficient use of funds to achieve agreed goals.
- The Commission should use development aid to South Asian countries to promote a new phase of citizen engagement in matters relating to development through increasing use of the Internet and promote the creation of a virtual network of South Asian Economic and Human Development Institutes for exchanging information between themselves and with their EU counterparts.
- The Commission should undertake the task of monitoring and coordinating the EU's bilateral, regional and multilateral efforts in South Asia for democracy building.

The Council of the European Union

The EU leadership should communicate with South Asian leaders its continued interest in holding dialogue on democratic growth and human rights improvements in South Asia. It should express its desire to promote exchanges of views between European and

South Asian policymakers on good practice in these fields and to build a partnership between the EU and South Asia on democracy in development.

Highlight Democracy in Development in the next EU-India Summit

At their next Summit meeting, the EU and India should consider issuing a joint statement that would, inter alia, highlight that democratic development in South Asia is a common interest of the peoples of the two regions and not a means to other ends. Democracy in development should be both an obligation and an intention of SAARC. Democracy in development deserves support as a system that meets the aspirations of the citizens of South Asia for a greater say and increased participation in their government, and not simply because it is judged instrumental to advancing the interests of the EU or India. The EU and India could also undertake collaborative efforts to promote democracy in other South Asian countries.

Establish a European Union-South Asia Special Fund

An EU-South Asia Special Fund should be launched to offer the experience and expertise of EU capacity-building, training and exchanges to South Asian countries bilaterally and through SAARC for:

- a. strengthening existing democratic institutions;
- b. developing a project operated under an agreement between International IDEA, the National Law School University of Delhi and the forthcoming South Asian University to formulate a course on democracy in development for compulsory study in the universities and post-secondary training institutions in South Asian countries, as well as distance learning courses on democracy in development for public servants and courses on democracy and human rights for civil service training programmes;
- c. SAARC-recognized NGOs such as SAARCLAW and SAFMA;
- d. establishing an efficient and effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism to review progress with the implementation of the SSC;
- e. organizing workshops on parliamentary practices and procedures for members of parliaments and their staff in emerging democracies;
- f. the elaboration of a South Asian consensus on democratic development with assistance from knowledgeable European Institutions and taking into account current developments in democracy building and related activities in other regional groupings such as ASEAN, the OAS, the OSCE and the parliamentary forum of the Southern Africa Development Community;
- g. regional collaboration programmes geared to the promotion of democratic futures, democratic transitions and democratic resilience in South Asian countries.

A European Union-SAARC Compact

An EU-SAARC compact would draw on the involvement of the civil societies of the EU and South Asia to establish a dialogue and true partnership in order to:

- Update the SAARC Social Charter with the adoption of certain provisions of the 1996 European Social Charter;
- Study and adapt the ways and means by which the provisions of the European Social Charter were implemented;
- Provide assistance from the EU to catalogue best practices in the field of democracy in development, leading to mutually beneficial exchanges on best practices and experiences in the two regions related to the encouragement and facilitation of participatory democracy;
- Promote a comparative study of the rule of law in the EU and South Asia;
- Increase the effectiveness of relevant institutional mechanisms in the EU and South Asia for promoting democracy in development, paying particular attention to the study of best practices on connectivity and transit from which South Asian policymakers might profit by facilitating greater travel, and more expeditious flows of information and goods across borders in South Asia;
- Identify measures to redress state fragility in the South Asian region through governance reforms, the rule of law, anti-corruption measures and building viable state institutions to fulfil a range of basic functions and meet the needs of citizens;
- Identify certain types of programme carried out under the aegis of European Regional Development Fund that could be undertaken in South Asia under the aegis of South Asian Development Fund set up by SAARC;
- Encourage increased involvement by legislatures and local authorities in advancing the objectives of democracy in development;
- Promote an approach of compromise and consensus in the workings of SAARC and in bilateral and regional negotiations on thorny issues linked to development.

Harness the Potential of the South Asian Diaspora in the European Union

Roughly 50 million South Asians live outside the region. The intellectual and other resources of the South Asian Diaspora in Europe, particularly of those residing in the UK, could be tapped to promote the concept of democracy in development in South Asia.

Accord International IDEA a Central Role

As a premier multilateral organization in the EU, International IDEA could be requested by EU and South Asian scholars to play an active role in developing policy coherence among the disparate actors active in the advancement of democracy in the region. International IDEA could:

- Hold consultations with the SAARC secretariat about the best means to incorporate partner organizations into the decision-making processes of the EU;
- Undertake consultations with both partner countries in South Asia and repre-

sentatives of the democracy assistance community, particularly the German Party Foundations which have been significant players in South Asian countries;

- Assess the level of demand in South Asia for democracy assistance;
- determine whether the specific recommendations referred to above are feasible and could make a useful contribution to the field; and
- Identify local partners to become involved from the countries that need to be assisted.
- International IDEA should organize a seminar/workshop which would have as background information for participants a concept paper prepared locally on the goals and parameters of democracy in South Asia, in order to strengthen and consolidate democracy in countries such as Bhutan, the Maldives and Nepal, which are going through a transition to parliamentary democracy.
- International IDEA should facilitate coordination of EU actions with other G-8 members with respect to the promotion of development goals in a democratic framework through the building of strong institutions in the emerging democracies of South Asia.

Finally, International IDEA should take the initiative to set up a small Joint EU-South Asia Group to formulate a proposal to establish a *South Asia Democracy Institute* to tackle issues related to rights, democracy and responsibilities and promote research into parliamentary democracy using experience in this field from the two regions. Such an institute could also study best practice within the South Asia region and in other regions and disseminate this information in South Asia. The EU could share its experience and knowledge of how political party representatives can usefully be included in the framework of a South Asia Democracy Institute. Pending the setting up of such an institute, a Centre for the Study and Promotion of Democracy could be set up for a limited time period either in the South Asian University or in a reputable National Law University in the region.

7. Conclusions

Mahatma Gandhi said that democracy must: ‘in essence mean the art and science of mobilizing the entire physical, economic and spiritual resources of all the various sections of people in the service of common good.’¹⁷

Can we think of having a reorientation of governance based on a blend of indigenous values of dharma and a modern day version of liberal democracy without confusing it with a leap in the past? South Asia should develop a vision for the future and a clear ambition to be a developed region in social, economic, political and psychological terms by a specific target date in the 21st century. Democracy in Development in South Asia should therefore be a process that is progressive in nature. It is a ladder that South Asians should keep climbing. Particular attention must be paid to arresting the qualitative decline in institutions dealing with matters that impact on democracy in development and to ensuring their autonomy.

¹⁷ Quoted in Sundeep Waslekar, ‘Culture, Values and Governance’, in Vohra (2001).

Policymakers in the EU and South Asia have a great responsibility. They must master their own respective faiths and traditions, and also the language of global citizenship and universal ethics. Progress would obviously need more than dharma and democracy. Development in rural areas, sensible use of modern technology and due priority given to agriculture, energy, education and health are other prerequisites in which democracy in development can play a key role.

South Asia can learn a lot from the modern day EU and especially from the working of its bodies such as the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights. In turn, the EU can learn from South Asia, particularly from India, about secularism, multiculturalism and federalism. A relationship in which the EU and South Asia each learn from and encourage the other should be the aim. If scholars and policy analysts in the two geographical regions put their minds to tackling the question of democracy in development, perhaps solutions may be found that much more quickly.

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